

"There is no success without risk"

Invest or eventually disappear from the market? Gerhard Frommelius recognised these two possibilities for his family business a year ago. But he knew that only he who dares, wins. Urokink Industries AG relocated its headquarters from Lower Saxony to Halberstadt in Saxony-Anhalt, moved to a larger production and storage facility, and increased its sales force. The risk was worth it.

"Made in Germany" is clearly legible on the cardboard boxes that are currently being packaged for delivery in the warehouse of the Halberstadt medical technology company Urokink Industries AG. The reference to production in Germany is seen as a seal of quality in many countries around the world. Gerhard Frommelius, CEO of Urokink, does not regard the promise of quality as merely a set phrase. "We cannot afford any mistakes with our products", he said decisively.

The company, which initially had its headquarters in Bad Münder near Hanover, has manufactured medical technology for urology at the site in Halberstadt since 2002. "Our endourological products transfer urine from the kidneys via the ureter to the bladder. The urinary products transport urine from the bladder out of the body", explains Gerhard Frommelius. Ureteral stents, urine bags and catheters, which are packaged in sterile condition in the clean room of his company, are sent to hospitals, retirement and nursing homes, doctors' surgeries, nursing services and retailers throughout Germany. The company is now also looking for buyers from abroad - initial contact has been made in France, Vietnam, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Dubai.

"Our quality is our trade mark", says company founder Gerhard Frommelius confidently, pointing to the framed certificates on the wall of the conference room. He finds the high quality standards of the European Union, which are placed on medical products before they get certified, hard but appropriate. "After all, it concerns the safety and well-being of patients." For the past 20 years, he has looked at how Urokink products can be further developed and improved. Gerhard Frommelius was 57 years old when he started concentrating on catheters and similar products. The mechanical engineer had many years of experience as a sales representative for the pharmaceutical industry and didn't want to retire. He founded Urokink and developed its first products. "I don't stop until something is perfect", he characterises himself. If someone wants to successfully put a product on the market, it is important that it is not developed from the drawing board. "I visited the urological departments of many clinics so that I knew what is used where and why." Permanent consultation with urologists was also indispensable.

Gerhard Frommelius picks up a white thin tube to show the special material properties. The fine tubes that Urokink uses are manufactured by the Halberstadt company Novoplast. "We have developed the material together. It is important that salts from the urine do not cling to the inside and do not accumulate on the outside surface. If a sharp-edged coating forms on the ureteral stent, this may result in pain when removing. We prevent this with our material." The newly developed permanent ureteral stent can remain in the body for up to six months.

Finding modern solutions is what the 77-year-old company founder is passionate about. He brought on his son-in-law Martin Hahn a few years ago, who takes care of finances and marketing. The small company faced a major decision in 2013. "We were not getting any further; the family could no longer do it on their own. We would have disappeared from the market if we had not decided to expand," explains Gerhard Frommelius. Urokink Industries AG increased its sales force team and thereby the activities in order to enter markets abroad. We relocated the headquarters of the company from Lower Saxony to Halberstadt in Saxony-Anhalt, where only production had previously taken place. We also rented a larger production and storage facility and hired new employees. "Of course it was a risk", Gerhard Frommelius admits. "We had to take out a loan but, as the saying goes, "no risk, no fun." Since the Investitionsbank Sachsen-Anhalt and the Bürgschaftsbank Sachsen-Anhalt supported the project, the company headquarters will now remain here for the long term. "That's just the way it is. That is my philosophy."

One year after the ground-breaking decision, the CEO is sure that it was the right decision. The company, which currently employs 29 workers, can gain more and more partners on the highly competitive medical market. Urokink achieved the annual turnover of 2013 in just the first half of 2014. It is now time for new ideas. "A sensible next step would be to find our own company headquarters instead of the rented rooms", plans Gerhard Frommelius for the future.

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